

Factors Facilitating the Level of Participation of Indigenous People in Community and in School Decision-Making Process

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in community and school decision-making processes in Barangay Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon, and examined the factors that facilitate or hinder such participation. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study collected data from 380 respondents, including tribal leaders, elders, community members, Indigenous parent representatives, school heads, and teachers, through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to analyze participation levels and facilitating factors, while the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the relationship between these factors and IP participation. Findings revealed that Indigenous Peoples exhibit a very high level of participation in community and school decision-making, with indicators such as the opportunity to vote or decide on matters and attendance at meetings receiving the highest ratings. Facilitating factors, including access to information, cultural values, trust in officials, and inclusive decision-making processes, were rated very high and significantly support IP engagement. Statistical analysis indicated no significant relationship between the identified facilitating factors and the overall level of participation, suggesting that other contextual or intrinsic motivators may also play a role. The study concludes that Indigenous Peoples in Namnam are actively engaged in decision-making processes despite facing challenges, and that culturally sensitive approaches and inclusive practices are crucial for sustaining participation. Recommendations include strengthening community engagement, empowering community leaders, enhancing school-based participatory programs, and incorporating Indigenous perspectives at higher education institutions such as Valencia Colleges. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and community organizers seeking to promote meaningful Indigenous participation in governance and education.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples (IPs), Participation, Community Governance, School Decision-Making, Facilitating Factors

INTRODUCTION

Participation in community decision-making is recognized as a fundamental human right, particularly for Indigenous Peoples (IPs) whose lives, culture, and ancestral territories are directly affected by governance policies and development initiatives. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) affirms that indigenous communities must be actively involved in decision-making processes in matters that affect their welfare, land, and cultural heritage. However, despite this international recognition, many indigenous communities continue to experience limited representation in political, social, and institutional decision-making bodies. Tomaselli (2017) explains that structural barriers, marginalization, and limited access to formal governance systems often prevent indigenous peoples from exercising their right to meaningful participation.

Globally, indigenous peoples constitute approximately 476 million individuals across more than 90 countries, representing around six percent of the world's population (United Nations, 2009). These communities play a vital role in preserving cultural traditions, protecting biodiversity, and maintaining sustainable environmental practices through their traditional ecological knowledge. Despite their significant contributions to society and environmental stewardship, indigenous peoples frequently encounter social exclusion, economic disadvantages,

and restricted access to education and governance opportunities. Cornell and Kalt (1998) emphasized that the lack of indigenous participation in policy-making often results in development programs that fail to address the cultural and social realities of indigenous communities.

Research has shown that inclusive participation of indigenous peoples in community governance leads to more equitable and culturally appropriate development outcomes. Berardi (2016) noted that when indigenous communities are actively involved in planning and decision-making processes, development initiatives tend to become more sustainable and responsive to local needs. Similarly, Alcantara and Nelles (2014) highlighted that participatory engagement empowers indigenous communities by strengthening their capacity for self-governance, protecting their cultural identity, and promoting collective responsibility in community development.

In the Philippines, indigenous peoples comprise approximately 9.4 million individuals, accounting for about 8.7 percent of the national population (World Bank, 2024). The Philippine government has enacted legal frameworks to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, most notably the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 or Republic Act No. 8371. This law recognizes the rights of indigenous cultural communities to ancestral domain, self-governance, cultural integrity, and participation in local governance structures. Despite these legal protections, many indigenous communities continue to face challenges in exercising these rights due to socio-economic barriers, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate representation in decision-making bodies (Pulhin, Ramirez, & Tapia, 2007).

The education sector has also made efforts to address indigenous inclusion through the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program of the Department of Education. According to the Department of Education (2021), the program has reached over 2.5 million indigenous learners across more than 42,000 public schools nationwide. The program aims to provide culturally responsive education that respects indigenous knowledge systems and promotes inclusive learning environments. Nevertheless, issues such as language barriers, geographic isolation, and limited community participation in school governance remain persistent challenges that affect the full integration of indigenous voices in educational decision-making.

Given these realities, there is a growing need to examine the level of participation of indigenous peoples in both community and school governance, particularly at the local level where policies and decisions directly influence daily life. Understanding how indigenous communities engage in decision-making processes can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing policies and identify opportunities for strengthening inclusive governance.

The present study focuses on the Indigenous Peoples community in Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon. This area represents a unique setting where traditional indigenous leadership structures coexist with formal government and educational institutions. Investigating the participation of indigenous peoples in community and school decision-making processes will help determine whether their voices are adequately represented and how their involvement contributes to local governance and development.

The researcher chose this study to better understand the current level of participation and inclusion of indigenous communities in decision-making processes that affect their welfare and educational opportunities. Examining these dynamics is essential in identifying gaps between policy intentions and actual practices at the grassroots level. By documenting the experiences and perspectives of indigenous community members, the study aims to highlight both the challenges and the strengths of participatory governance within the local context.

Furthermore, the study is relevant because it contributes to broader efforts to promote inclusive governance, social justice, and culturally responsive education. The findings may provide useful information for policymakers, educators, community leaders, and local government units in strengthening programs that support indigenous participation and empowerment. Ultimately, the study seeks to advocate for greater recognition of indigenous voices in community development and educational decision-making, ensuring that policies and programs are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of indigenous communities.

This study is anchored on Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), which conceptualizes participation as a continuum ranging from non-participation to full citizen control. Arnstein explains that participation becomes meaningful when individuals are empowered to influence decisions that affect their lives. In the context of Indigenous Peoples (IPs), this theory highlights the importance of ensuring that community members are not merely informed about decisions but are actively involved in shaping policies and programs affecting their welfare, culture, and education. Complementing this theory is Paulo Freire’s Theory of Empowerment and Participatory Development (1970), which emphasizes dialogue, awareness, and collective action as tools for empowering marginalized communities. Freire asserts that participation becomes transformative when individuals develop critical consciousness and actively engage in decision-making processes.

Figure 1 Presents the Schematic Diagram of the Study

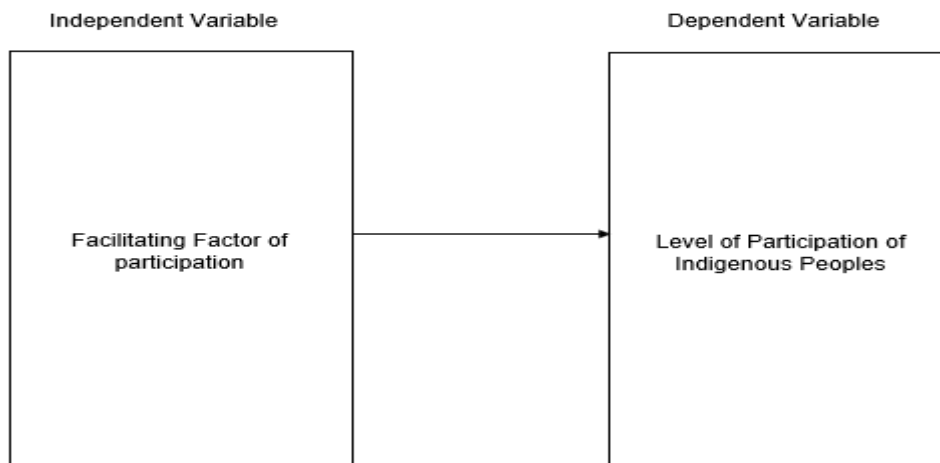


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram showing the Relationship of the Independent and Dependent Variables of the Study

This study aimed to determine the factors facilitating the level of participation of IP in community and in school decision- making process in Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in community and school decision-making processes?
2. What factors facilitate the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in community and school decision-making processes?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the facilitating factors and the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in community and school decision-making processes?

Hypothesis of the Study

The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between facilitating factors and the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in community and school decision-making processes.

Delimitation of the Study

This study aimed to determine the factors facilitating the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in community and school decision-making processes in Barangay Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon, for the calendar year 2025. The study focused on identifying the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples and the facilitating factors that influence their involvement in community and educational governance.

The respondents of the study were Indigenous parents or guardians residing in Barangay Namnam whose children are currently enrolled in the selected IP schools in the area. These parents are considered key stakeholders in their children's educational development and are often involved in school-related activities, community assemblies, and consultations on educational programs and community development. The selection of Barangay Namnam as the study locale was based on the presence of an active Indigenous Peoples population, the community's accessibility to the researcher, and the existence of IP schools serving Indigenous learners. These conditions provided an appropriate environment for gathering relevant data regarding the level of participation of Indigenous parents in community and school decision-making processes.

The study used a survey questionnaire adapted from the frameworks of Arnstein (1969), Freire (1970), and UNESCO (2019). The research was limited to Indigenous Peoples residing in Barangay Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon, and did not extend to other IP communities in neighboring barangays or municipalities. Moreover, the study did not assess the effectiveness of government or non-governmental organization (NGO) programs; rather, it focused on understanding the extent of participation and the facilitating factors influencing Indigenous parents' involvement in local and school decision-making processes.

METHODS

This chapter presents the research methodology employed in the study. It includes the research design, research locale, study respondents, sampling procedure, research instrument, data-gathering procedure, scoring procedure, statistical treatment of data, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design to determine the level of participation of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in community and school decision-making processes and to examine the relationship between facilitating factors and participation. This design allowed the description of existing conditions and the analysis of relationships among variables without manipulation.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Barangay Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon, Philippines, an area with a strong Indigenous Peoples (IP) presence. The community's active cultural practices and leadership structures provided a relevant context for examining participation in decision-making processes.

Participants of the Study

The respondents were 380 Indigenous Peoples, including tribal leaders, elders, community members, and parents or guardians of learners enrolled in IP schools. Participants were included regardless of their level of prior participation.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by School

School Name	Respondents
Basbasan Tu Balakayao	107
Panuluanan Tu Natampod	52
Basbasan Tu Butay	18
Panuluanon Tu Opis	130
Panuluanan Tu Alubihid	73
Total	380

Sampling Procedure

Total enumeration sampling was used, wherein all qualified members of the population were included. This ensured comprehensive representation and minimized sampling bias.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire adapted from Cornwall (2008), Mansuri and Rao (2013), and UNESCO (2019). The instrument included four parts: (1) demographic profile, (2) decision-making mechanisms, (3) level of participation, and (4) facilitating factors. Responses for Parts III and IV used a five-point Likert scale.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review. Reliability testing yielded an acceptable Cronbach's alpha, indicating good internal consistency.

Scoring Procedure

Responses were interpreted using a five-point Likert scale:

Scale	Range	Interpretation
5	4.21–5.00	Very High
4	3.41–4.20	High
3	2.61–3.40	Moderate
2	1.81–2.60	Low
1	1.00–1.80	Very Low

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was obtained from relevant authorities, including community leaders and the NCIP. The researcher administered the questionnaires and assisted respondents when necessary, using the local dialect. Completed questionnaires were collected, checked, and prepared for analysis.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Frequency and percentage were used for demographic data. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine participation and facilitating factors. Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to test the relationship between variables.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Cultural sensitivity was observed, and all data were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on the stated research problems. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation.

Level of Participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in Decision-Making

Table 1. Level of Participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP)

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Opportunity to vote/decide	5.00	0.000	Very High
Attendance in meetings	4.79	0.406	Very High
Decisions reflect community needs	4.66	0.474	Very High
Respect for Indigenous knowledge	4.66	0.474	Very High
Encouraged to share opinions	4.58	0.634	Very High
Suggestions considered	4.52	0.710	Very High
Representation in councils	4.51	0.739	Very High
Overall	4.67	0.213	Very High

The findings revealed that Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Barangay Namnam demonstrate a very high level of participation in both community and school decision-making processes (M = 4.67). Indicators such as opportunity to vote or decide, attendance in meetings, and recognition of Indigenous knowledge all received very high ratings, indicating that participation is not merely symbolic but actively practiced within the community.

This level of engagement reflects higher stages in Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), particularly the levels of partnership and delegated power, where individuals are not only informed but are directly involved in influencing decisions. The high rating for voting opportunities suggests that IP members have some control over governance processes, a key indicator of meaningful participation.

Furthermore, the strong emphasis on dialogue, shared decision-making, and respect for Indigenous knowledge aligns with Freire’s Theory of Empowerment (1970). Freire posits that participation becomes transformative when individuals engage in dialogue and contribute their lived experiences to collective decision-making. In this context, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems indicates that participation is culturally grounded and reflective of the community’s identity.

However, the relatively low representation in formal councils suggests that, while participation is widespread, institutional power may not be fully distributed. This supports Arnstein’s assertion that participation without full access to decision-making authority may still reflect partial empowerment. Thus, although IP participation is high, there remains an opportunity to strengthen representation in formal governance structures.

Factors Facilitating Participation of Indigenous Peoples (IP)

Table 2. Facilitating Factors of Participation

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Access to information	4.93	0.257	Very High
Cultural values and traditions	4.91	0.286	Very High
Trust in officials	4.90	0.300	Very High

Community unity	4.90	0.300	Very High
Inclusive processes	4.90	0.300	Very High
Recognition of Indigenous knowledge	4.88	0.320	Very High
Respect for IP voices	4.87	0.336	Very High
Freedom to express opinions	4.85	0.355	Very High
Support from leaders	4.70	0.586	Very High
Educational experiences	4.67	0.630	Very High
Overall	4.85	0.169	Very High

The results further indicate that facilitating factors influencing participation were rated very high (M = 4.85). Among these, access to information, cultural values and traditions, trust in officials, and community unity emerged as the most significant contributors.

The prominence of access to information supports Arnstein’s framework, which identifies information as a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful participation. Without adequate access to information, individuals cannot effectively engage in decision-making processes. In this study, the high rating suggests that communication channels within the community are functional and inclusive.

More importantly, cultural values and traditions were among the highest-rated factors, highlighting that participation in Indigenous communities is deeply rooted in shared beliefs, practices, and social norms. This finding strongly aligns with Freire’s theory, which emphasizes that participation is not merely a structural process but a product of collective consciousness and cultural identity. In Indigenous contexts, participation is sustained not only by institutional mechanisms but by long-standing traditions of communal decision-making and mutual responsibility.

Trust and community unity further reinforce this perspective. Freire highlights that trust and dialogue are essential elements of empowerment, as they foster collaboration and collective action. The high ratings in these areas suggest that participation is supported by strong social cohesion, enabling individuals to engage confidently in governance processes.

Interestingly, educational experiences received the lowest (though still very high) rating among the facilitating factors. This suggests that formal education plays a supportive but less dominant role compared to cultural and social influences. This finding implies that participation is more strongly shaped by lived experiences and traditional knowledge systems than by formal institutional learning, further reinforcing the relevance of culturally responsive approaches.

Relationship Between Facilitating Factors and Participation

Table 3. Relationship Between Facilitating Factors and Participation

Variable	r	p-value	Interpretation
Facilitating Factors vs Participation	0.007	0.889	Not Significant

Despite the very high ratings for both participation and facilitating factors, the correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between the two variables (r = 0.007, p = 0.889). This finding suggests that facilitating factors, although present and strong, do not directly predict the level of participation among Indigenous Peoples.

This result warrants deeper interpretation. One plausible explanation is that participation in Indigenous communities is culturally embedded and not dependent on external conditions. Unlike conventional models that assume participation increases with structural support, Indigenous participation may already be sustained by cultural norms, shared identity, and traditional governance practices. In this context, participation is not contingent upon facilitating factors because it is an inherent component of community life.

This interpretation aligns with Freire's Theory of Empowerment, which posits that participation emerges from critical consciousness and collective identity rather than external incentives. Indigenous community members engage in decision-making not solely because enabling factors are present, but because participation is regarded as a cultural expectation and shared responsibility.

Another possible explanation is the presence of a ceiling effect, wherein both participation and facilitating factors were rated very high, resulting in limited variability in the data. This statistical condition reduces the likelihood of detecting significant relationships, even when variables may be conceptually related.

Moreover, the influence of informal governance systems may account for the non-significant result. Indigenous communities often rely on traditional leadership structures, such as councils of elders, which operate alongside formal institutions. These customary systems may exert a stronger influence on participation than the facilitating factors measured in the study.

From the perspective of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, this finding suggests that participation in Indigenous contexts does not necessarily follow a linear progression based on access to resources or institutional support. Instead, participation may already exist at advanced levels due to deeply rooted cultural and communal structures.

Overall, the non-significant relationship indicates that participation among Indigenous Peoples is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, shaped more by cultural, social, and historical dynamics than by measurable facilitating variables alone.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Indigenous Peoples in Barangay Namnam exhibit a highly participatory and culturally grounded governance system. While facilitating factors such as access to information, trust, and inclusive processes are present and supportive, they do not solely determine participation levels.

Anchored in Arnstein's theory, the study confirms that meaningful participation occurs when individuals actively influence decision-making processes. However, the findings extend this perspective by showing that, in Indigenous contexts, participation is not only a function of institutional arrangements but also of cultural continuity and collective identity.

From Freire's perspective, participation is deeply rooted in empowerment, dialogue, and shared consciousness. This explains why participation remains high even in the absence of a statistically significant relationship with facilitating factors. Participation is sustained not merely by external structures but by internalized cultural values and communal responsibility.

Thus, the study contributes to a broader understanding of Indigenous participation as a culturally embedded social process that requires context-sensitive approaches in both policy and practice.

Furthermore, these findings resonate with observations from other Indigenous communities in the Philippines and beyond, where participation is similarly shaped by cultural norms and traditional governance systems. Studies of groups such as the Lumad and Cordilleran communities indicate that participation is often sustained by customary leadership structures and collective identity rather than by formal institutional mechanisms. This suggests that the patterns observed in Barangay Namnam are not isolated but may reflect broader Indigenous governance dynamics, thereby enhancing the study's generalizability.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that Indigenous Peoples in Barangay Namnam demonstrate a very high level of participation in decision-making processes, supported by strong cultural, social, and institutional conditions. However, the absence of a significant relationship between facilitating factors and participation reveals that engagement is deeply rooted in cultural norms and communal practices rather than external structures alone.

This highlights the need to reconceptualize participation in Indigenous contexts—not merely as a product of governance mechanisms but as a culturally sustained social process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Indigenous communities should continue to strengthen their participatory structures, ensuring that all members—including elders, youth, and parents—have opportunities to voice their opinions and influence decisions. Regular programs or forums should be held to increase awareness of community and school governance processes, thereby sustaining high engagement levels.

Community Leaders and Local Officials. Tribal elders, community leaders, and local officials are encouraged to maintain open, inclusive, and culturally sensitive decision-making practices. They should provide continuous support, recognize Indigenous knowledge and traditions, and implement structured feedback mechanisms to ensure that community members feel represented and valued in governance processes.

Schools implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) program should actively involve IP parents, students, and community representatives in school governance. Activities such as school assemblies, consultations, and decision-making workshops should be strengthened to ensure that educational policies and programs reflect the needs and culture of Indigenous learners.

Teachers should facilitate and encourage IP students' participation in classroom and school-level decision-making. They should integrate Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and cultural practices into lessons and activities to reinforce students' sense of inclusion and ownership in their learning and school community.

Valencia Colleges and other higher education institutions may support Indigenous communities by providing training programs, workshops, or extension projects that help enhance leadership skills, civic engagement, and understanding of Indigenous governance systems. They could collaborate with local IP communities to participate in research, community-based projects, and initiatives that promote cultural preservation and inclusive decision-making.

Policy Makers and Government Agencies such as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and the Department of Education should ensure that programs aimed at increasing Indigenous participation are accessible, culturally sensitive, and sustainable. Measures should address barriers such as financial constraints, time limitations, and limited access to information to promote equitable participation.

Future researchers who wish to explore Indigenous Peoples' participation in community and school decision-making processes may consider expanding the scope of the study to include other Indigenous communities beyond Namnam, San Fernando, Bukidnon. This would allow for comparative analyses across different cultural groups and local governance structures.

Finally, future studies could focus on developing practical intervention programs or workshops in collaboration with schools, teachers, community leaders, and higher education institutions like Valencia Colleges. These programs could test strategies to enhance Indigenous engagement and leadership, providing actionable models that can be replicated in other Indigenous communities.

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